Secord Testifies About Meeting George At White House Session on Iran Arms

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By George Lardner Jr.
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Richard V. Secord, the ubiquitous middleman of the Iran-contra affair, said yesterday that he met then-CIA clandestine services chief Clair E. George at the White House in early 1986 at a session called to discuss direct U.S. arms sales to Iran.

Secord, a gruff, retired Air Force major general, said he sat within a few feet of George and recalled how the high-ranking CIA official questioned the White House decision not to notify Congress of the new Iran initiative.

George, the CIA's deputy director for operations from 1984 to 1987, is on trial in U.S. District Court here on nine counts of lying and obstructing congressional and grand jury investigations of the Iran-contra scandal. The charges include two counts alleging that he lied in denying that he had any contacts with Secord and saying that he "never laid eyes" on him.

Called as a prosecution witness but plainly uncomfortable in the role, Secord said he met George only once, in the White House situation room on Jan. 20, 1986, and had "no conversation" with him beyond an introduction by White House aide Oliver L. North.

President Ronald Reagan had signed a "finding" authorizing U.S. arms sales to Iran through third parties on Jan. 17, 1986, and Secord said he had agreed to be the "commercial cutout" for the covert operation. He said he was invited to the meeting by North or his secretary, "so others involved would know who the third party was."

"It was my job to be the logistician," Secord explained. He said he used a network he had set up to bill the Iranians for the weapons, arrange for their delivery to Tehran and reimburse the CIA at government prices for the armaments.

Secord had been selling arms to the contra rebels in Nicaragua since late 1984 at North's behest and organized his "network" in 1985 to airlift military supplies to the contras despite congressional attempts to prohibit such assistance.

He said yesterday that White House national security adviser John M. Poindexter asked him to help out "with what became known as the Iran initiative" at a meeting in early January 1986, after a series of arms-for-hostages deals through Israel in 1985 had freed only one of five Americans held hostage in Lebanon.

Under questioning by George's chief defense lawyer, Richard A. Hibey, Secord said much of the discussion at the Jan. 20 meeting concerned Reagan's decision not to tell Congress about the finding authorizing the CIA, through third parties, sell the arms.

CIA general counsel Stanley Sporkin, Secord recalled, supported the no-notice provision while George questioned its wisdom.

Secord said he subsequently worked with other CIA officials on the Iran arms sales, including Thomas Twetten and George Cave, but "never" with Clair George.

"You had no more meetings with Clair George on the contras?" Hibey asked.

"Correct," Secord replied.

"Did you ever have a meeting with Clair George on the contras?"

"No," Secord said. "I never had a meeting with him on any subject."

George was questioned about Secord by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Oct. 10, 1986, following the shootdown of a contra resupply plane over Nicaragua.

Asked by Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) whether he had had "any contact" with Secord at all, George replied, according to a tape played in the courtroom, "No. I know his name well and I have known his name for years. But I do not know the man."

Asked about Secord at a Dec. 3, 1986, hearing of the Senate intelligence committee in connection with the Iran initiative, George declared that he "never laid eyes" on him.

Secord pleaded guilty in 1989 to one felony count of lying to Congress and drew two years' probation. He also signed a plea agreement with the government to cooperate with independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh's investigation.

RICHARD V. SECORD
... details January 1986 encounter

Secord told Iran-contra prosecutor Samuel Wilkins that George was sitting "next to me" or directly across a conference table.

George did recall meeting Secord, a man with a controversial background, when he gave a deposition to the Senate-House Iran-contra investigating committee on April 24, 1987. George said then that Secord was introduced to him as "a consultant to the National Security Council." On hearing that, George recalled, "I said, 'Whoopie.' "

Staff writer Walter Pincus contributed to this report.